

A Throbbing, Vital Romance of American Life

"I'll buy it from her," repeated Adela with steadfastness; "I must have it—I must have it—how much does she want?"



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Howards, also Christine Halstead. "I thought," began Adela, but Clark quickly, almost rudely, interrupted her. He knew what she was going to say—that he and Christine Halstead would somehow unite their destinies, and he couldn't bear to hear that—from Adela.

"They are repaving Boone Street," he broke in abruptly, apropos of nothing, and Adela smiled at his guileless lack of skill. The western visitor's Mecca, the Waldorf, was fixed for the luncheon, and there at one o'clock Adela met him.

That luncheon almost frightened Adela. The stimulus given to Arthur Clark by the call to Washington moved him to a self-revelation, to a revelation of long-treasured attachment to herself that threw her into a distracted perplexity. She was realizing that this man to whom she had barely given a thought from one year's end to another had been treasuring every look of hers, every gesture, every word she had ever uttered in his hearing. She felt that she must break away from him before he surprised her own cool neutrality regarding him, which she helplessly told herself she could not dissimulate. She was deeply touched, yet to her the luncheon seemed endless.

He insisted, however, upon walking uptown with her, to her door, and begged for a few moments longer.

"I am going to-night on the midnight train," he pleaded, "and I don't know when I shall see you, Adela." She hoped that Clarice might have returned, but no Clarice was there. The studio was empty.

"And this is where you have been living and working," he said, gazing about the heterogeneous plainness as though it were sacred. "You ought to try to keep these things in memory of—in memory of—"

"But they are not mine, Arthur," she helped him in his confusion. "They belong to my friend—Clarice—on her honeymoon. I expect her back any minute."

She could have bitten her tongue out for mentioning the honeymoon and the imminence of Clarice. For both these facts seemed to lend the young man a desperate courage.

"Oh, Adela," he broke forth without preamble, "if you could only think of me! I have loved you so long! But—forgive me—"

are you engaged? Perhaps oughtn't to have spoken that way—" and he waited.

"No—I am not engaged," she was constrained to say, only to regret her words immediately.

"Listen, Adela—I have loved you ever since I can remember. I've never been able to think of another girl. You've been everything to me since we were kids—life—all that is worth while!" He spoke easily enough now with the pent-up power of a silent man. "Give me a word of encouragement, of hope! If there's no other man, won't you give me a chance? Just one word of hope, Adela, something to live for—to live with—say one word, Addie!" And he held out his broad, strong hands in pathetic supplication.

Adela touched his hands lightly with her own and quickly withdrew them. A deep sigh shook her.

"Listen, Arthur," she said softly. "I am so flattered—I can hardly tell you—and I am so sorry! But honestly, Arthur, I am not worth it." He made a gesture—"No," she pursued, "this isn't false modesty or humility, or anything like that. It's true. I'd be downright wicked not to tell you the truth. I was engaged to Anthony. But we are not engaged now. I don't even know where he is—in the Army somewhere. We've had—well—a disagreement. But I've had time to find out—" and her lips quivered and the tears started to her eyes, "that I shall never care for anybody else—that way—I wish—oh, no!—what's the use of saying that?—I don't wish—oh, I'm too miserable to talk straight, Arthur. But won't you believe me, and be my friend? The tears were streaming freely now and she held out a tremulous hand.

He took it and gazed down at it with head bowed by a weight of disappointment. Then on a sudden he rose, looked at her for a space and in a manner surprisingly courteously for a man who described himself as a hayseed, he kissed her hand, humbly, loyally, warmly.

"I understand, Addie," he murmured huskily. "You feel about you the way I feel about you. Well—never mind. Forgive me. I hope it'll come right—but if ever

you change your mind—" Adela sadly shook her head.

"I'm afraid I can never change my heart," she said.

He was burning to offer help, consolation, service. But his old shyness again overcame him. Adela seemed to big a person for any help from him.

When Arthur Clark had gone, Adela's sense of deep and disconsolate loneliness thickened about her like a fog. It was July. The country was girding its loins, groping as yet, for its immense enterprise; handfuls of American troops were already landing in France; war correspondents were debating as to whether the Yanks, the Teddies or the Sammies would be the exact and official American equivalent of the poilus and the Tommies; Washington was seething with myriads of activities still in the entangled stages of experiment; and German propaganda was engaged in some of its tallest laughing at our expense. We had no men; and if we had men, we had no ships; and if we had ships, they had the U-boats. English and French visitors were praising us to the skies for our courageous resolution, and we heartily agreed with them. Nevertheless we were all in a state of constant surprise to find every day a little more of our individual series merging into the general titanic self of the nation as a whole.

In the face of all this Adela found herself mentally backing into a corner, as one ashamed of her personal pre-occupations. Yet her isolation ground her suffering the more deeply into her soul. What was she going to do? When one's life seems at an end how can one begin anything? Immense stores of energy are necessary for any beginning and energy comes to the happy or to the desperate. Nothing freezes the spring of initiative like

sheer gray misery. She had no idea what she was going to do when Clarice returned. Why was she doomed to be forever harassed by doubts and uncertainty? She supposed she ought to go home, but a heavy inertia possessed her and made that seem impossible. Beyond all things she craved enforced activity, and home meant the opposite. Yet Clarice would want the studio when she returned—Was she, Adela, a harsh old termagant and had she judged Anthony basely after all?

When Clarice did return, two days after Clark's departure, she came in like a guest, with a new and indescribably softened radiance about her. She made Adela think of a lamp exquisitely shaded to render its light beautiful.

"Oh, darling!" cried Adela in a flutter of joyous excitement, "but where is Douglas?"

"Gone to earn his daily bread," laughed Clarice. "We're staying at the Algonquin."

"You will want the studio, dear," Adela made an excellent attempt to conceal her heaviness of heart. "I shall clear out at once."

"You will do nothing of the sort, child," Clarice informed her. "We are at the Algonquin and we like it—and, anyway, we would need a larger apartment."

"We—we—we," there is always a touch of bitterness in the conjugal war to the splinter, notably when her own other I has of late been torn from her, by whatever misadventure.

Adela was at a loss. She protested weakly, but she could not struggle. If only she could remain here a few days and gather will

power! For she certainly lacked enough of it now to move herself elsewhere.

"I wish I possessed the will power of a kitten—to fight you," she remarked wearily, looking away. And then Clarice knew that Adela's trouble was still morant. She had thought, just before she had gone away, that a perceptible change for the better had come. But now she told herself she had been mistaken. So she mothered Adela and comforted her as best she could, but inwardly she was berating Anthony vigorously.

She was going upstairs to look at a larger apartment that the man in the renting office had told her was to be let, now temporarily occupied. It was one of the few furnished studios to be had in the building, and at her option, the agent told her, she could furnish it to her own taste, and he would remove the things that were there. She was on the point of asking Adela to accompany her, but some instinct within her told her this was not the moment for Adela to survey another's conjugal nest. With a pat on Adela's pale cheeks she murmured:

"I'll be back soon," and slipped out.

When Clarice returned half an hour later she was carrying something enclosed in her left hand, and with her right she made a joyous gesture upward.

"I have taken the studio upstairs," she announced, "and look what I've got here!"

In her left palm as she disclosed it lay a moderate-sized ruby in a golden setting with a little golden chain curled around it.

Adela gazed at it with simulated interest. Ornaments had been far

from her thoughts just before Clarice's entrance.

"The stone is loose," explained Clarice. "I have offered to fasten it for her—the woman in the studio, I mean—she is going away and wants to sell it. I have a great mind to buy it from her. Don't you think it's sweet, Adela?"

Adela stood up and examined the pendant gingerly. She stretched out the links to the full length of the fine chain and the ruby lay in her own palm.

A strange sense of familiarity haunted her brain as her eyes gazed at it. Clarice turned to her little work table where lay the neglected implements of her metal work.

Adela gazed and gazed, and suddenly a flash of knowledge came to her, accompanied by a sensation as of a blow with a heavy mass upon the head.

She knew now! This was Mrs. West's pendant—the ruby—"fire of youth," as she had called it—Anthony's mother!

Only twice before had she seen it, when she was a young girl. How vividly the old life flashed up before her! When Anthony was her playmate, and his father and mother, whom she had loved almost as her own, were living. The pendant—how well she remembered it now! Anthony's mother's precious heirloom!

Like one groping in darkness she turned the stone over to see the

of thought that has been from time immemorial a human faculty, until to-day even science admits it, the truth suddenly flashed into Clarice's mind also.

She, too, understood now! "That battered adventures!" she thought, as the image of Madame Vanleer came before her mind's eye.

She leaped up suddenly. "Give it to me, Addie," she exclaimed, blithely holding out her hand for the pendant. "I'll see that you get it—since you like it so much—she can't ask a fortune for it—mustn't show her how much we want it, though—ta—ta!" And with an eager energy she swished out of the room.

"Whatever happens, poor Addie mustn't see her," was her thought as she took two steps at a time. Then suddenly she stopped, laughed softly, and composed herself to a decorous gravity. In her heart were tears, but on her lips was an urbane smile when next she confronted Madame Vanleer.

"I'm afraid I was promising too much," she informed her. "I have been away and the tools of my trade are scattered. I could do it in a day or two."

"Ah! but the Nieuw Amsterdam sails to-morrow!" said Vilma.

Clarice was scrutinizing her covertly. Time had been no friend to Vilma. Life has a way of ravaging her kind. But she still possessed some remnants of her old sensual good looks.

"She could make up well," thought Clarice. "Just the sort a romantic boy might fall for!"

In the result Clarice obtained the pendant for four hundred dollars. "I got it for a mere song, dear,"

she informed Adela joyously a few minutes later, "and I want you to accept it as a little gift from me." "Oh, no! I couldn't!" cried Adela, recoiling. "I couldn't. I must pay for it, Clarice, dear. How much was it?"

"A mere song," expostulated Clarice.

"But how much?" inserted Adela in a voice rasped by pain. "I want it more than I can tell you."

"Only a hundred dollars," yielded Clarice disappointedly. "I've never given you a thing. You might let me give it to you."

"No," sternly answered Adela. And a moment later she was shaking with sobs on Clarice's sympathetic bosom. Yet no further word about the pendant passed between them. It was unnecessary.

Somehow to Clarice's surprise Adela made no further reference to the Vanleer woman, and, so far from a desire to see her, she was obviously filled with a repugnance at the thought.

Shadow and silence were all that Adela seemed to crave.

Two weeks later Adela was enrolled as a student in the nurses' school of Bellevue Hospital. The tide of our young manhood was already rolling eastward and we were beginning to prepare for the wreckage it would bring back to us later. Happiness, Adela told herself, was not for her.

Life had still much to inculcate and to teach her, and with a sure instinct, as always, she chose a royal road to her learning.

To Be Continued Next Sunday.
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